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ABSTRACT

A study determined what careers 11th- and 12th-grade students have chosen and who was the greatest influence in their choices. It identified the following: (1) career choices teachers selected for the most able student; (2) career counseling roles for school personnel; and (3) major influences in students' career choices. Questionnaires were developed and administered to all high school teachers and 11th- and 12th-grade students of three Upper Cumberland, Tennessee, high schools. Surveyed students as a group listed other, vocations, business, undecided, and medicine as their top five career choices. Teachers as a group ranked engineering, medicine/business, high tech, vocations, and law as preferred careers for their most able students. Students selected friends, others, mothers, fathers, and vocational teachers as the most influential persons in their choice of careers. When schoolmates, friends, and others are combined, 55 percent of the students' choice influence comes from individuals with limited career information. Teachers indicated that fathers, mothers, counselors, vocational teachers, and science teachers/others should be the most influential in student career choice. In general, students and teachers reported that salary is the primary reason students do not choose education as a career, followed by educational requirements and working conditions. (Eleven data tables are provided.) (YLB)

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A STUDY OF STUDENT CAREER CHOICES IN THREE HIGH SCHOOLS OF THE UPPER CUMBERLAND REGION OF MIDDLE TENNESEE

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A STUDY OF STUDENT CAREER CHOICES IN THREE HIGH SCHOOLS OF THE UPPER CUMBERLAND REGION OR MIDDLE TENNESSEE

Introduction

During the fall of 1983 the Tennessee State Legislature met in special sessions to evaluate and review educational proposals necessary to draft legislation on education reform. After weeks of debate and compromise legislation was drafted and presented to the General Assembly. This activity resulted in the passage of the Comprehensive Reform Act of 1984.

One of the major goals of the reform legislation was to attract an adequate number of the states' most able students into education to improve teacher quality and eliminate all request for employment standards waivers within a five-year period. There may be many reasons why individuals choose or not choose a particular career. The most able student may not choose education because of the attitudes of their parents and teachers. According to the 16th Annual Gallup Poll more than half of the parents with children in public schools would object to their children becoming teachers.

Statement of the Problem

Achieving the intent of the "Comprehensive Reform Act" of attracting the most able students into education and eliminating employment standards waivers could be a challenging task if those significant to students are not supportive. But not knowing who are influencing students career choices will make success extremely difficult, if not impossible. Therefore, this study sought to determine what careers 11th and 12th grade students have choosen and who was the greatest influence in their choices. Additionally, the study identified the career choices teachers selected for the most able student, career counseling roles for school personnel and major influences in students

career choices.

Significance of the Study

Changes are made in education, it appears, often without adequate implementation data on all organizational components (modern math, open space, team teaching, Educational TV) affected by the change. Some prophets of doom are already predicting the current reform efforts in Tennessee will fail as did most of their predecessors. If the number of uncertified or partially certified teachers employed in 1985 is an indication of future trends, it is significant that a study be conducted to provide additional information on the implementation of change process.

Research Procedure and Results

Questionnaires were developed and administered to each high school teacher, all 11th and 12th grade students of three Upper Cumberland High Tennessee Schools. The study's major questions were:

1) What careers teachers thought their most able students should pursue;
b) What careers students plan to follow;
c) What individual teachers thought should be most infleuntial in student career choices;
d) Who students said were the most infleuntial in their career choice;
e) What school personnel teachers select to provide career counseling services to students;
f) What teachers thought were the reasons why the most able students did not choose education as a career;
g) Student reasons for not choosing education as a career;
h) If teachers thought they should try and persuade the most able students to go into teaching and if able students had been encouraged to go into education by teachers.

Limited personal data were requested from students and teachers to form a reference point for possible areas of analysis. The variables used in the analysis were: sex; grade levels; core subjects and group totals, using frequencies as the statistical procedures.

Personal data of the study population of teachers revealed a nearly even

split between females (58) and males (50) spanning all courses. Core subjects of English, Math, Science and Social Studies were also evenly divided between females (24) and males (23). However, the composition within subjects was skewed either female or male; fourteen of the fourteen math positions were staffed by females; Science and Social Studies had a combined staff of sixteen with only one female teacher. No attempt was made to determine sex equilibrium within the remaining 56% of the teaching population. Teachers, based on years of experience in education, divide themselves as follows: 57% had 12 or more years of experience; 20% had eight to eleven years of experience; 18% had four to seven years of experience; with only 5% having less than four years of experience.

Selected personal data were requested from each participating student. Occupation or profession of parents or guardian was deemed important from the position that parents' status is critical to childrens' orientation. However, occupations and/or professions for this study were broadly defined categories. Laborer as an example includes job in factories, construction and farming. Student personal data responses are presented in Tables I and II.

The occupation representing fathers most frequently was the trade category, followed by labor. Mothers tended to be either laborers or homemakers. It could be assumed from the small number of parents representing occupations that require post-high school training, the value placed on education could be limited.

The grade categories represent the students' indication of the grades they received most often on school work. Indications are that over two-thirds of the students in the sample are able students if school grades of A's and B's can be used as indicators.

Students and teachers responses to career choice questions are reported in

Table 1

Occupation or Profession of Parents of Guardian

Parents	Labor	Mgmt.	Prof.	Trade	Farmer	Homemaker	Other	
Father	20.5	9.0	6.5	25.5	5.5	0.0	10.5	11th
Mother	30.5	6.0	7.5	4.0	0.0	21.0	6.5	Grade
Father	17.0	11.0	9.5	19.5	6.0	0.0	13.5	12th
Mother	31.5	6.5	15.0	2.0	0.0	24.5	4.0	Grade
Father	18.5	10.0	8.0	22.5	5.0	0.0	10.0	Total
Mother	31.0	6.0	11.0	3.0	0.0	22.5	5.0	
Total	49.5	16.0	19.0	25.5	5.0	22.5	15.0	

Table II

Grade Distribution

Grade	A's	B's	C's	D's	F's
11th	12.0	50.0	26.5	1.5	1.0
12th	21.5	52.5	20.0	1.0	0.5
Total	17.75	51.25	23.25	1.75	0.75

Table III

Student Career Choice Data

Career	12th Grade F%	12th Grade M%	12th Grade Total%	11th Grade F%	11th Grade M%	11th Grade Total%	Group Total%
Law	3.5	6.0	4.5	3.0	3.5	3.0	4.0
Business	20.0	12.0	16.0	21.0	8.0	14.5	15.0
Medicine	16.5	5.0	10.5	16.0	3.0	9.5	10.0
High Tech	3.0	7.5	5.0	1.0	3.0	2.0	3.5
Banking	3.0	0.0	1.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1.0
Politics	0.0	2.0	1.0	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.5
Education	8.0	0.5	4.0	3.0	1.0	2.0	3.0
Real Estate	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Clergy	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	1.5	1.0	1.0
Engineering	0.5	11.0	5.5	0.5	5.5	3.0	4.0
Vocation(s)	9.5	22.0	15.5	11.0	21.0	15.5	15.5
Advertising	0.0	0.5	0.0	4.5	0.5	2.5	1.5
Other	21.0	24.5	22.5	15.0	27.5	21.0	22.0
Undecided	11.5	10.0	10.5	21.0	17.5	19.0	14.5
N -	117	134	251	180	137	317	568

Table IV

Teacher Career Choices for the Most Able Student

Occupation Profession	Female	Male	Total	English Teachers	Math Teachers	Social Studies Teachers	Science Teachers
Law	17.0	28.0	22.0	29.0	21.0	63.0	25.0
Medicine	33.0	31.0	34.0	41.0	36.0	63.0	75.0
Business	33.0	36.0	34.0	35.0	29.0	63.0	38.0
High Tech	21.0	30.0	30.0	35.0	50.0	13.0	38.0
Banking	12.0	6.0	9.0	12.0	7.0	13.0	0.0
Politics	8.0	8.0	8.0	12.0	7.0	13.0	25.0
Education	17.0	22.0	19.0	12.0	29.0	25.0	13.0
Real Estate	10.0	12.0	11.0	0.0	7.0	13.0	0.0
Engineering	29.0	40.0	35.0	41.0	43.0	38.0	50.0
Clergy	1.0	6.0	4.0	0.0	7.0	0.0	13.0
Advertising	7.0	4.0	6.0	0.0	7.0	0.0	0.0
Vocations	29.0	28.0	29.0	35.0	29.0	13.0	13.0
Other	5.0	16.0	10.0	12.0	0.0	0.0	13.0
N -	58	50	108	17	14	8	8

Tables III and IV.

From the thirteen possible career choices, 12th grade females selected in rank order, top five places: other, business, medicine, undecided, vocations.

Twelfth grade males followed females in their first choice of other vocations, business, engineering, undecided.

For twelfth grade students as a group first choice was the other category followed by: business, vocations, undecided and medicine.

Eleventh grade females selected business and undecided as their first choice. Medicine, other, and vocations. completed the top five choices.

Eleventh grade males chose other as their first choice, followed by vocations, undecided, business, and engineering. As a group, eleventh graders' top selections were other, undecided, vocations, business, medicine.

Surveyed students as a group listed other, vocations, business, undecided and medicine as their top five career choices.

Approximately 13% of the responding students had not choosen a career.

Female teachers career recommendations based on responses to the first five career categories, were: business/medicine; engineering/vocation; high tech; law/education and real estate. Male teachers first five choices were: engineering, business, medicine, high tech and law/vocation.

Teachers as a group ranked engineering, medicine/business, high tech, vocations and law as preferred careers for their most able students.

The first career choice of teachers from the core subject areas for the most able student was engineering. English teachers first five choices were medicine/engineering, business, high tech, vocation and law, with two occupations tied for first and three tied for second. Math teachers ranked high tech, engineering, medicine, business/education/vocation first through fifth place. Social studies teachers first place were law/medicine/business,

followed by engineering and education. While science teachers ranked medicine first by 75% of the teachers. Engineering, business/high tech and politics completed the science teachers selection.

Tables V and VI contain student and teacher responses to the question of "most" influential in the student career choice.

Twelfth grade female respondents indicate that something or someone other than immediate family, school personnel, schoolmates or friends are the greatest influence on their career choice. Friends rank second followed by their mother, father and vocational teacher. Male students first choice was the same as their female classmates, other; followed by father, friends, mother and schoolmates.

Eleventh grade females' friends are the greatest influence followed by mother, other, vocational teachers and father. Male eleventh graders selected friends first with fathers, mothers, others and vocational teachers following in rank order.

Students as a group selected friends, others, mothers, fathers and vocational teachers as the most influential persons in their choice of careers.

When schoolmates, friends and others are combined, 55% of the students choice influence comes from individuals with limited career information.

Female teachers indicates that mothers and fathers should be the most influential individuals in students choice of career. Following next are counselors, vocational and English teachers. Male teachers on the otherhand chose fathers first, counselors second and mothers third, followed by vocational teachers with English/social studies teachers tying for fifth.

Teachers as a group indicated that fathers, mothers, counselors, vocational teachers and science teachers/others should be the most influential in student career choice.

Table V

Most Influential in Student Career Choice

Influences	12th Grade F	12th Grade M	12th Grade Total	11th Grade F	11th Grade M	11th Grade Total	Group Total
Mother	26.0	12.0	19.0	27.0	16.5	21.5	20.0
Schoolmate	0.0	9.0	4.5	6.5	6.0	6.0	5.0
Brother	0.0	7.0	3.5	0.0	7.0	3.5	3.5
English Teacher	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.5	1.0	1.0	1.0
Principal	0.0	1.0	0.5	0.0	1.0	0.5	0.5
Sister	1.0	0.5	0.75	7.5	0.0	3.5	2.0
Science Teacher	0.0	2.5	1.25	1.0	0.0	0.5	0.5
Father	11.0	25.0	18.0	11.0	22.0	16.5	17.0
Math Teacher	0.0	0.5	0.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	0.5
Social Stu. Teacher	0.0	1.0	0.5	0.5	0.0	0.0	0.0
Vocation Teacher	17.0	8.0	12.5	14.0	10.0	12.0	12.0
Friend	27.0	20.0	23.5	30.0	30.0	30.0	27.0
Counselor	6.0	0.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	1.5	2.0
Other	28.0	31.0	29.5	21.0	15.0	18.0	23.5
N	117	134	251	180	137	317	568

Table VI

Teachers Indication of Who Should be Most Influential In Students Career Choice

Occupation Profession	Female	Male	Total	English Teachers	Math Teachers	Social Studies Teachers	Science Teachers
Mother	52.0	43.0	47.0	41.0	57.0	88.0	38.0
Schoolmate	8.0	4.0	6.0	6.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Brother	0.0	8.0	4.0	0.0	7.0	0.0	13.0
English Teacher	10.0	4.0	7.0	0.0	7.0	0.0	0.0
Principal	5.0	4.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Sister	0.0	4.0	2.0	0.0	7.0	0.0	0.0
Science Teacher	8.0	10.0	9.0	0.0	7.0	0.0	13.0
Father	47.0	70.0	59.0	41.0	75.0	75.0	75.0
Math Teacher	8.0	6.0	7.0	0.0	15.0	0.0	0.0
Counselors	43.0	44.0	43.0	53.0	29.0	63.0	50.0
Social Stu. Teachers	10.0	2.0	6.0	0.0	0.0	13.0	0.0
Vocation Teacher	14.0	24.0	19.0	6.0	0.0	13.0	13.0
Other	8.0	10.0	9.0	53.0	7.0	13.0	0.0
N	58	50	108	17	14	8	8

English teachers, when taken as a discrete group, 53% indicated counselors and the category other should be the most influential in the students career selection process. Math and science teachers collectively believe that fathers are most influential while social studies teachers prefer mothers at the 88% level. Counselors rate first, second or third with each of the special teacher sub-groups.

English teachers placed vocational teachers fifth among the most influential and omitted themselves completely. Math teachers gave English teachers, themselves, brothers/sisters, and others the same level of influence. Social studies teachers ranked vocational teachers, themselves, and others fifth among the most influential. Science teachers rank vocational teachers, themselves and brothers fourth in a line of most influential.

Individuals and/or groups receiving the least support as influential are: sister, brother/principal, social studies teachers/schoolmates, English/math teachers and others.

Reasons for not choosing education as a career are reported in Tables VII and VIII.

Students differed only slightly on their reasons for not choosing education as a career. As a group salary was the major factor, followed by educational requirements and working conditions.

Teachers by sex and group total indicate salary is the primary reason students do not choose education as a career, followed by working conditions and educational requirements.

This finding is identical to the responses given by students.

Teachers were asked which members of the staff should provide career counseling services to students. Their responses are presented in Table IX.

Teachers indicated overwhelmingly that career counseling at the school

Table VII

Student Reason(s) For Not Choosing Education as a Career

Reason	12th Grade	11th Grade	Group
Salary	51.5	39.0	45.0
Working Conditions	23.5	12.0	17.5
Required Education	15.5	20.5	18.0
Location of Position	7.0	6.5	6.5
What People Say About Education	7.5	9.0	8.0
Other	16.5	16.0	16.0

Table VIII

Teachers Reason(s) For Students Not Choosing Education as a Career

Reason	Female	Male	Total
Salary	76.0	86.0	81.0
Working Conditions	14.0	26.0	20.0
Required Education	10.0	16.0	13.0
Location of Position	0.0	8.0	4.0
What People Say About Education	0.0	2.0	1.0
Other	9.0	0.0	4.5

Table IX

School Provided Career Counseling

Service Providers	Female	Male	Total
Academic Area Teachers	28.0	44.0	35.0
Vocational Area Teachers	31.0	42.0	36.0
Counselors	76.0	92.0	83.0
Principal	14.0	18.0	16.0
Other	7.0	0.0	4.0

level should be provided by the counseling personnel. Minor counseling roles according to the data indicated equal responsibility between academic area teachers and vocational area teachers. The principal is perceived as having a very limited responsiblility.

The last question for students attempted to determine the level of "encouragement" they received from teachers to become a teacher. Eighty-four percent (84.0) of the 11th graders and eighty-one percent (81.0) of the 12th graders indicated they have never been encouraged to become teachers.

Teachers responded to their last question by indicating forty-four percent (44.0) "yes" and fifty-six percent (56.0) "no" whether teachers should try and persuade students to choose education as a career.

Tables X and XI present a comparison of student to teachers responses on career choices and career choice influences in rank order for each group's first five choices.

Career choice indications of students revealed a high percentage were interested in careers not listed among the survey choices or they are undecided. Vocations, business, and medicine were selected most frequently from the categories listed. The most compatible categories between students and teachers were vocations and business. Medicine also ranked in the top five of each group.

Except for friends and counselors, the most influential in students career choices were compatible between students and teachers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The following conclusions and recommendations were significant to this study:

1) Students and teachers differ widely on the question of career choice.

Table X

Career Choice Comparison

Students			Teachers		
Other	22.0	1st	Engineering	35.0	1st
Undecided	19.0	2nd	Business	34.0	2nd
Vocations	15.5	3rd	Medicine	34.0	2nd
Business	15.0	4th	High Tech	30.0	3rd
Medicine	10.0	5th	Vocations	29.0	4th
			Law	22.0	5th

Table XI

Career Choice Most Influential Comparison

Students			Teachers		
Friends*	27.0	1st	Fathers	59.0	1st
Others	23.5	2nd	Mothers	57.0	2nd
Mothers	20.0	3rd	Counselors	43.0	3rd
Fathers	17.0	4th	Voc. Teachers	19.0	4th
Voc. Teachers	12.0	5th	Science Teachers & Other	9.0	5th

*Not included among teacher choices.

2) Students and teachers differ on who should and who were the most influential n students career choice selection.

3) Students and teachers agreed that salary was the primary reason for students not going into education as a career.

4) Students received very limited career counseling directions from the schools' professional staff.

5) Students were poorly informed about their standardized test data and were not encouraged to go into education as a career by teachers.

6) Teachers viewed seven career categories ahead of education and indicated an unwillingness to recruit students to education.

7) Teachers viewed career counseling responsibility as a parent, school counselor and vocational teacher function.

8) If these findings are symptomatic of conditions in high schools across the state, the ability to achieve the goal of attracting the most able students into education and eliminating employment standards waivers is an impossible assignment.

These conclusions suggest a need for the following state and school level sponsored activities:

1) Assign some career counseling responsibilities to all instructional personnel.

2) Implement a structured education opportunity awareness program for students beginning at the eighth or ninth grade level and their parents.

3) Design and implement an able student identification and recruitment program

4) Promote education as a rewarding career.

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